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DEPT FOR D, AF/FO, AF/RSA, AND AF/SPG  
DEPT PLS PASS USAID FOR AFR/EA AND DCHA SUDAN GROUP

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SUBJECT: Update on Darfur IOM Detainees Case

Ref: Khartoum 01409

¶1. Summary: Late on June 14, the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) released the remaining five of seven International Organization for Migration (IOM) staff detained on June 13 by a field commander loyal to the Abdel Wahid faction near Kutum, North Darfur State. The faction suspected the team of serving as spies, and stated that future visits to the area would require permission from the field commander. End summary.

¶2. On June 13, an IOM team of one international and six national staff was reported missing in Kutum, in North Darfur State. Earlier the same day, the team departed Kutum for Irgie (50 km west of Kutum). Last contact with the team was made at 1:38 p.m. that day, when the team was located 35 km west of Kutum. The UNDSS later contacted the local community in Kutum with no results on the party's whereabouts. The AU, NGOs, and other sources were contacted in the area, and the UNDSS tried to establish contact with Musa Hilal, a prominent leader of armed militia in the area. The UNDSS subsequently launched a search and rescue team.

¶3. On the afternoon of June 14, the captors released the international staff member and a Sudanese woman staff member. Later on June 14, the Abdel Wahid-affiliated SLA field commander released the five remaining IOM staff (all Sudanese men) and their vehicles. They spent the night in Kutum and are traveling back to El Fasher on June 15.

¶4. There is no generalized feeling in North Darfur that the UN is being targeted or that recent events are attempts to intimidate. The Abdel Wahid field commander who was holding the IOM staff is pro-UN, but does not trust Sudanese staff. The Sudanese staff were accused of spying for the Mini Minawi SLA faction and the GNU. The field commander stated that any groups traveling through his territory must contact him directly and not rely on other SLA notifications. IOM reportedly got lost on the road and inadvertently traveled into the area. (Note: the UN indicates that the AU commander in Kutum reportedly was instrumental in negotiating the release of the IOM staff. End note.)

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